

## **Project Narrative**

### **A. Cover Page**

1. Project title: **RCAC/EPA Region 10 Regional Multi-Environmental Media Environmental Finance Center**
2. Name of applicant: Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC)
3. EFC Category: 1) Regional Multi-Environmental Media Environmental Finance Center (EFC)
4. EPA Region: Region 10 (R10)
5. Has the applicant received an EFC grant in the past from EPA? Yes
6. Key personnel and contact information:  
Ari Neumann, Director, Community & Environmental Services  
Email: [aneumann@rcac.org](mailto:aneumann@rcac.org) Telephone: (916) 588-0112
7. Total project cost: \$3,033,528
8. Project period: October 1, 2022 – September 30, 2027

## **B. Executive Summary**

To help significant numbers of disadvantaged rural and Tribal communities within EPA R10 build their capacity to ensure compliance with environmental regulations and effectively utilize federal investment from the EPA, RCAC will lead and manage a project team that will operate a collaborative, responsive, and innovative Regional Multi-Environmental Media EFC. The proposed EFC, located in Salem, Oregon, will provide applied academic project expertise coupled with field practitioners' on-the-ground experience and knowledge. RCAC has identified Zender Environmental Health and Research Group (ZEHRG) and Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) as appropriate and necessary partners to successfully conduct the project.

### ***Outputs***

- Provide small, rural, Tribal, and/or disadvantaged communities in EPA Region 10 with technical assistance (TA) and training to build managerial and financial capacity to equitably develop, implement, finance and support sustainable public-purpose water, wastewater, and solid waste environmental infrastructure systems.
- Provide an established number of communities, determined by the EFC's work plan, with training and knowledge of available infrastructure funding and financing resources.
- Provide an established number of states or Tribal governments, determined by the EFC's work plan, with technical assistance to identify and pursue tools, resources and other opportunities that support state and/or Tribal SRF programs to build their TA offerings to support disadvantaged communities.
- Develop and implement training courses, information exchanges, and forums that focus on environmental finance.
- Develop electronic models and software tools focused on paying for environmental protection.
- Develop case studies and lessons learned materials related to asset management, financial planning, and effective communication of needs for infrastructure investments and environmental projects (particularly for rural, small, Tribal, and/or disadvantaged communities).
- Develop tools and resources to support identification of communities that need assistance, and to track the status of solutions.

### ***Outcomes***

- An increase in the number of communities (especially small, rural, Tribal, underserved, and/or disadvantaged communities) that successfully apply for and access financing and funding for infrastructure projects.
- An increase in the number of communities (especially small, rural, Tribal, underserved, and/or disadvantaged communities) that understand how to access financing and funding for infrastructure projects.
- An increase in the number of local, state, and Tribal governments, and non-governmental organizations that have the financial, technical, and institutional resources and capabilities to pay for environmental protection and operate in compliance with environmental requirements.

## C. Workplan

### i. *Project Description*

Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC), with its partner, Zender Environmental Health and Research Group (ZEHRG), and in collaboration with Rural Community Assistance Partnership, Inc. (RCAP), will create and operate a collaborative, responsive and innovative Regional Multi-Environmental Media EFC in EPA Region 10. The proposed EFC, located in Salem, Oregon, will join applied academic project expertise with field practitioners' capacity building on-the-ground experience and knowledge. Our group has the capacity to provide culturally competent trainings and TA to the regulated communities in R10 in all areas of environmental finance. Initially, the EFC will have specific areas of focus including identification of disadvantaged communities most in need of technical assistance; development of a community development workplan template tool; refinement of existing asset management tools to incorporate GIS technologies; and planning and development of sustainable utilities in disadvantaged, rural communities, farmworker communities, communities in Indian Country and Alaska Native Villages

The EFC will create a Disadvantaged Community Identification (DCI) tool, a GIS map with multiple layers of social, economic and environmental indicators to assist in prioritizing initial outreach, and technical assistance to areas that are most likely to experience inequalities when accessing funding for projects. This GIS tool will inform community and Tribal needs and inform TA/Training outreach efforts for the EFC and State and Federal agencies. These layers may include but are not limited to:

- Income and poverty demographics
- Federally recognized Tribes
- Community Viability indexes
- Pollution burden
- Natural disaster vulnerability
- State defined Disadvantaged Communities (DAC) status
- State Drinking Water SRF affordability criteria/ census block
- Systems that recently received federal funds
- Environmental Justice indicators

The EFC will develop a Community Development Workplan (CDW) Template tool that will provide a list of potential TA and Training that communities may consider to increase their capacity to support economic development and construction of resilient, sustainable, environmentally friendly community infrastructure. CDWs will include recommended long-term training programs for community members to develop on-the-ground leadership skills. In subsequent years, the EFC and partners will work directly with community pilot projects to provide the TA and Training indicated by the select communities' CDWs.

The EFC will provide regulated communities with information on ways to finance their environmental protection and public health responsibilities while ensuring environmental justice. This work will be accomplished through educational events, creation and dissemination of finance-related tools and studies, research, and on- and off-site direct TA and training. Training delivery will be through face-to-face workshops and events, webinars and web-based learning modules.

Outputs of the proposed project (Year 1) will include trainings/events in each state in conjunction with infrastructure funding events such as the IACC (infrastructure Assistance Coordination Council)

conference, or Business Oregon's One Stop Financing roundtables . In states with existing funding coordination and education events, the EFC will bolster and augment event offerings. In states with no existing, or burgeoning infrastructure financing events, the EFC will start up or enhance local efforts to have strong active infrastructure funding fairs in all states. A CDW will be developed and beta tested by EFC staff and partners. Select existing EFC developed tools such as the climate relocation decision trees and others will be translated into the Yup'ik language for Alaskan communities. The EFC will partner with Region 10 EPA to provide Yup'ik translation services for EPA's R10 Indian General Assistance (IGA) program Notice of Funding Availability and direct translation of select educational materials. The EFC will collaborate with R10 EPA and ZEHRG to assist Alaska Tribes with IGA grants to create backhaul programs, and provide Yup'ik language translation services for Backhaul Alaska educational events and educational materials, including videos, and other tools.

In collaboration with EPA R10 and state primacy agencies, communities will be selected to receive direct on-site TA, with at least one-third of the projects in Indian Country/Alaska Native Villages. Additional annual activities include training, webinars, and applied community research projects. The R10 EFC will maintain a resource rich website and produce Public Service Announcement videos to educate Alaska communities on the health and environmental impacts of hazardous e-wastes in landfills. Years 2-5 will build on activities conducted in Year 1 and reflect feedback from EPA R10, state primacy agencies and the local regulated community.

The proposed project's outcomes will include:

- Regulated parties, including states, Tribes and local communities have practical, real-world training, TA and information that allows them to increase the sustainability of the environmental financing systems that support all their environmental and public health media.
- Environmental financing systems will be strengthened so that water and wastewater systems are able to achieve long-term compliance by having and planning for the financial resources needed to address financial, technical and institutional issues.

The EFC R10 will address Goals 1-5 of the EPA Strategic Plan, detailed in section ix below, in addition to having strong linkages with the four cross-agency strategies. Our focus on initially identifying rural, disadvantaged communities and Tribes that have traditionally been underserved, then targeting these communities for strategic long-term outreach efforts, will allow these overlooked and excluded communities to take full advantage of federal programs that were designed to assist them. This will advance environmental justice and the new era of EPA partnerships while helping to create a sustainable future that makes a visible difference in communities.

ii. Actions/Methods, Providers, and Timelines

**Table 1**

	Provider	Action/Method	Year 1 Q1	Year 1 Q2	Year 1 Q3	Year 1 Q4	Year 2-5
1	RCAC	Project mobilization	X				
2	RCAC	Quarterly/semiannual reports/as determined by EPA Project Officer	X	X	X	X	X
3	RCAC/RCAP	EFAB/EFC network/National EPA coordination	X	X	X	X	X
4	RCAC/ ZEHRG	Development and refinement of GIS tools, including low cost GIS technology alternatives, Cost of Service analysis tools, Community Development Workplan tools, Solid Waste Management/Backhaul Alaska related tools, Disaster Response & Recovery tools, and other environmental finance related tools resource website	X	X	X	X	X
5	RCAC/ ZEHRG/RCAP	Presentations/trainings at state infrastructure funding events (schedule coordinated with existing events)			X	X	X
6	RCAC/ ZEHRG	Direct technical assistance		X	X	X	X
7	RCAC/ ZEHRG	Face-to-face training and webinars, web-based learning modules	X	X	X	X	X
8	RCAC/ ZEHRG	Environmental Finance related applied research demonstration projects		X	X	X	X

iii. Associated Work Products

Details of associated work products provided below Table 2.

**Table 2**

Action/Method		Work Products	Proposed Quantity Year 1	Annual Yr. 2-5
<b>1 Program Coordination</b>				
1.1	Project mobilization	Executed cooperative agreement with EPA, subcontracts with Partners and RCAP	3 executed contracts	3 executed contracts
		Hire/schedule existing staff, finalize executable detailed work plan	Fully mobilized program	Work plan updated annually
1.2	Reports to EPA	Reports per EPA specifications	2-4 reports	2-4 reports
1.3	EFAB/EFC network/National EPA coordination	Attend semi-annual EFAB meetings Coordination with national EFC partners in-person, and via email/telephone Coordination with national EPA office	4 in-person meetings Semi-monthly telephone/ email contacts (24+)	4 in-person meetings Semi-monthly telephone/ email contacts (24+)

2 Tools and Outreach				
2.1	Development/ Refinement of tools	Review/refine existing tools – -Disadvantaged Community identification (DCI) Tool -GIS tools for communities and Tribes -Cost of service analysis tools -Community Development Workplan (CDW) template -Translation of existing tools and curricula to Yup’ik for Alaskan Communities	-Ongoing review of existing tools -Beta DCI Tool development -Beta CDW tool developed	Ongoing review and refinement of tools
	Other environmental finance related tools	Review/refine/integrate existing tools - including other EFC’s financial dashboards and EPAs Climate Resilience Evaluation and Awareness Tool (CREAT) and others  Create tools to fill identified gaps.	3 tools reviewed 1 tool refined 1 tool developed	4-5 tools reviewed 1 tool refined 1 tool developed annually
2.2	EFC Website	R10 website repository for links to tools, calendar, resources	Website developed and maintained	New material posted on website; website maintained
3 Direct TA				
3.1	Direct technical assistance	Using the DCI tool and in consultation with EPA, IHS and State Water and Wastewater and Solid Waste regulatory agencies, EFC will identify community and Tribal TA needs. TA topics could include energy management, solid waste assessment and planning, regionalization assessment, asset management, climate relocation, disaster response and recovery, backhaul programs (Alaska), GIS asset mapping and training on EFC tools. On-site and remote support.	5 TA projects, 2 of which will be Tribal	5 TA projects, 2 of which will be Tribal
		Responsive TA to regulated utilities TA topics above On-site and remote support	15 TA projects (3-5 per state)	15 TA projects (3-5 per state)
4 Training				
4.1	State infrastructure funding events	Coordination with and Providing Training Proposed topics: Tribal Financing, R10 ECF tools. Regionalization Strategies and Approaches, Energy Management, Integrated environmental infrastructure planning, GIS support for infrastructure decision making. Innovative financial approaches. Use of Census data. Reports/case studies on EFC research projects (#8)	2 trainings/ presentations at up to 4 state fairs (8 total)	2 trainings/ presentations at up to 4 state fairs (8 total)
4.2	Training	In-person	11 total 8 per state 3 tribal focus	11 total 8 per state 3 tribal focus
		Webinar Web based learning modules (year 2-6)	11 total 3 tribal topic	11 total/year 3 webinars 1 web based module added per year 3 tribal topics

		Training topics may include: Using EFC developed tools, GIS technology for asset management, implementing and using GIS maps and watershed data, CREAT, regionalization, energy management, solid waste management, disaster response and recovery, backhaul program development (Alaska) and other topics related to the general operations of small, rural utilities.		
<b>5 Research and demonstration projects</b>				
5.1	Environmental Finance related research and demonstration projects	Applied community research projects – Partner ZEHRG will research and produce PSAs to educate Alaska Communities of the harm hazardous wastes such as batteries and electronics can pose to human health and subsistence resources, to encourage communities to implement solid waste collection programs. RCAC and ZEHRG will also conduct other local demonstration projects or trainings as requested.	Up to 2 videos	Up to 2 videos annually

## 1. Program Coordination

- 1.1. Project Mobilization: On notice of award, RCAC will work with the National EPA and other partners to develop the cooperative agreement and associated subcontracts. RCAC's EFC Manager will create a one-year work plan. Partner staff will be assigned to EFC tasks, and as needed, staff will be hired and trained. Annually, Years 2-5 contracts and agreements will be issued and/or modified as needed. Updated work plans will be developed, reflecting lessons learned and responding to community needs.
- 1.2. Reports to EPA: RCAC will collect all required data and provide reports as specified by EPA. RCAC has a dedicated Grants and Contracts Administration (GCA) Unit, with staff assigned to specific departments and contracts. The GCA staff assigned to this contract will work with the EFC Manager and project partners to collect, analyze, and create reports that meet all standard reporting requirements. RCAC's EFC Manager, staff, and partners will create specialized and technical reports.
- 1.3. EFAB/EFC Network//National EPA and local Stakeholder Coordination: RCAC's national RCAP partner, based in Washington DC. will regularly attend the semi-annual EFAB meetings, and other EFC staff may attend as appropriate. RCAP and the EFC Manager will coordinate with the national EFC network partners in meetings, teleconferences and email for information sharing and planning. RCAP will coordinate and meet with national EPA staff. EFC staff will meet regularly with Region 10 EPA staff. The EFC Manager and EFC staff will routinely meet with State Drinking Water and Wastewater Primacy agencies, State Clean Water and Drinking Water SRFs, Indian Health Services and other local agencies to assess current community and Tribal TA and Training needs, obtain information about conditions and challenges facing local communities, and provide updates about ongoing EFC efforts. EFC staff will routinely meet with and report to the Region 10 EFC Program officer to provide updates on project progress, plan future project activities, add new tasks and projects to the scope of work as requested, and consult and collaborate on technical issues that will help the EFC perform effectively.



## **2. Tools and Outreach**

- 2.1. Development and refinement of tools and other environmental finance tools: The EFC will develop a Community Development Workplan (CDW) Template tool, which will recommend TA and Trainings that communities will need to build their capacity to support economic development and construction of resilient, sustainable, environmentally friendly, community infrastructure. CDWs will include recommended long-term training programs for community members to develop on-the-ground leadership skills. The EFC will create a GIS map tool designed to highlight trends and relationships between different social, environmental, and economic risk factors and other environmental justice indicators that may not otherwise be readily apparent. Existing EPA and other stakeholder tools will be reviewed/refined. The EFC will create new tools as requested by R10 EPA.
- 2.2. Region 10 EFC Website: The existing R10 EFC website will be continuously updated to provide links to tools, resources, and a calendar of events.

## **3. Direct Technical Assistance**

- 3.1. Direct TA: In collaboration with EPA R10 and state primacy agencies, the EFC will select communities to receive direct on-site technical assistance, with one-third of the projects in Indian Country/Alaska Native Villages. RCAC staff will lead the TA, addressing specific utility needs. Core support will be on-site as allowed, supplemented with remote (telephone/email) support. Areas of TA will include consolidation/regionalization, asset management planning, user rate evaluation, project development, project financing, project management, and all components of infrastructure, staffing, management, and financing. Other TA topics may include solid waste program management, funding applications, project financing strategies, disaster response and recovery, and a full range of technical, managerial, financial topics for water, wastewater and solid waste utilities. The EFC will offer selected trainings in the Yup'ik language in Alaska, and Spanish language workshops in Latino and farmworker communities. See table above for additional topics.

## **4. Training**

- 4.1. State Infrastructure Funding Events: The R10 EFC has the support of the existing IACC (Infrastructure Assistance Coordinating Council) in Washington State to provide training, and will work with existing funding agencies like Business Oregon to strengthen existing public outreach and educational activities in Idaho and Alaska. These funding events will bring together the EFC's prime audience – utilities interested in obtaining financing for environmental projects. The EFC will provide presentations at the three regional NAWMA meetings (NAWMA is described below). The EFC will maximize its interaction with the funding fairs as an opportunity for outreach and marketing, a key opportunity for training, information sharing, and tool dissemination, and to collect information on needs and gaps. RCAC and RCAP will actively promote attendance at these events when conducting outreach to potential project communities. See table above for topics.
- 4.2. Training: The EFC will offer a robust training series. RCAC state-based and environmental specialists and ZEHRG staff will conduct training in-person, on webinars, and in years 2-5, through web-based learning modules. The in-person training will be offered at EFC sites in Salem, in addition to easily accessible sites in each state. Webinars are live classrooms, led by RCAC trainers and/or partner trainers, offered on rural/Tribal user-friendly internet platforms. Trainings will include topics specifically for Tribal utilities. The EFC GIS/Tool Pathway, described above in #4, will guide training topics.



## 5. Research and Demonstration Projects

5.1. Environmental Finance related research and demonstration projects: Partner ZEHRG has a strong record of encouraging and supporting Alaska communities with solid waste management and Backhaul Alaska projects, including promotion of a *product stewardship program* that would require manufacturers to pay for waste collection depots in every community, and pay for the labor and shipping costs to transport out wastes covered under the program. For product stewardship to be adopted in Alaska and work in the communities as well, residents need to consider waste a priority and realize the health risks if it is improperly managed. Therefore, ZEHRG will research and produce Public Service Announcement videos that will educate Alaska communities on the harm electronics and batteries can cause and propel them to implement needed solid waste collection programs and support product stewardship programs for backhauling. Educational materials or videos may additionally be translated into the Central Alaskan Yup'ik language. RCAC and ZEHRG will also conduct local demonstration projects as requested by R10 EPA.

### ii. Project Partnerships:

The roles and responsibilities of lead applicant, RCAC, and its partners in the R10 EFC are outlined below.

#### Rural Community Assistance Corporation

##### *Role*

RCAC will lead and coordinate all R10 EFC activities and will serve as the EPA liaison.

##### *Responsibilities*

- Collect data from partners
- Create comprehensive, timely reports
- With RCAP, ensure active involvement and attendance at all major meetings
- Coordinate and contribute to DCI and other tool development
- Host the R10 EFC website
- Lead development, coordination, and provision of trainings for State infrastructure funding events
- Lead development, coordination, and provision of all in-person and virtual trainings
- Lead coordination with Region 10 EPA, State SRF's and primacy agencies
- Provide direct technical assistance and lead all TA projects
- Provide direct and virtual TA to communities to build their capacity to submit funding applications and manage funds received
- Translate education materials into Central Alaskan Yup'ik and provide real time verbal translations during live EPA and stakeholder events for Alaskan communities
- Conduct pilot projects to beta test tools developed under this agreement with select communities

#### Rural Community Assistance Partnership

RCAC is the western partner for RCAP, a national network of nonprofits working to provide technical assistance, training, resources, and support to rural communities across every state, the U.S. territories, and Tribal lands. RCAP's mission is to ensure everyone has access to safe drinking water and sanitary wastewater.

### *Role*

RCAP will assist the R10 EFC to identify community needs and build local technical, managerial and financial capacity to meet those needs.

### *Responsibilities*

- Assist RCAC to implement water and wastewater technical assistance programs
- Assist RCAC to provide community specific TA and training to small water and wastewater systems

### Zender Environmental Health and Research Group (ZEHRG)

ZEHRG, based in Anchorage, AK, is a conservation nonprofit with a deep commitment to building stronger, healthier, and more sustainable solid waste infrastructure in Alaska Villages and communities. Through programs such as Backhaul Alaska, ZEHRG works with up to 100 communities each year, most of which are isolated Alaska Native Villages off the road system. With established community relationships that go back over a decade or more, ZEHRG is in unique position to learn from and assist communities through exchanging local village-based lessons and solutions, while identifying rural community environmental program issues from a scientific lens at the regional, statewide, and international level.

### *Role*

ZEHRG will assist the R10 EFC by producing Public Service Announcement videos that explain the harm electronics, batteries, and more can pose to human health and subsistence resources. The videos will serve to educate Alaska communities in the harm electronics and batteries can cause and propel them to implement needed solid waste collection programs and to support of product stewardship for backhauling. Each year, different videos or other specific projects towards moving communities to more sustainable financing would be planned and produced. ZEHRG will lend its expertise to other projects or trainings as requested.

### *Responsibilities*

- Assist RCAC to implement solid waste and water quality technical assistance programs and trainings
- Manage videos/projects, research and coordinate scripting ideas, communicate with involved villages, and provide professional videography

As the lead applicant, RCAC estimates it will provide subawards in the amount of \$50,000 to ZEHRG during each year of the five-year project.

### **iii. Technical Assistance, Research, Training, and Financial and Environmental Results and Measuring Progress**

#### *a. Stated Strategic Goal and Objective/Link to EPA Strategic Plan*

The Objective of the proposed project is to operate a collaborative, responsive, and innovative Regional Water Infrastructure EFC in EPA Region 10. The activities to be funded under the Environmental Finance Center Grant Program will support the following Strategic Goals and Objectives of EPA's FY 2022-2026 Strategic Plan:

- Goal 1: Tackle the Climate Crisis:
  - Objective 1.2: Accelerate Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Change Impacts

Region 10 EFC activities will assist in tackling the climate crisis through programs that identify and access financing for energy efficient utilities and support technical, managerial, and financial improvements in water and wastewater utilities. Utility operations and asset management strategies will include maximizing energy efficiency design and operational efficiency. The R10 EFC's focus on regionalization can result in the replacement of multiple aging, inefficient infrastructure facilities with a combined updated high efficiency utility.

- Goal 2: Take Decisive Action to Advance Environmental Justice and Civil Rights:
  - Objective 2.1: Promote Environmental Justice and Civil Rights at the Federal, Tribal, State and Local Levels

Most of the communities the RCAC/R10 EFC will assist are economically disadvantaged, and many have significant minority populations, including Tribal members and Hispanic farmworkers, that lack the resources to address problematic environmental issues. RCAC advocates on environmental justice issues on behalf of disadvantaged, rural communities in its 13-state western footprint at the federal, Tribal, state and local levels. For example, in 2018, RCAC sponsored AB 2060, which expanded existing law to allow advance payments from the California State Water Resources Control Board to allow Disadvantaged Communities (DACs) to access funding programs for design and construction costs for water and wastewater projects. RCAC also assisted Region 10 to conduct workshops in Alaska in the Central Alaskan Yup'ik language, and currently provides translation services to help linguistically isolated communities access EPA resources.

- Goal 3: Enforce Environmental Laws and Ensure Compliance:
  - Objective 3.2: Detect Violations and Promote Compliance

The primary objective of RCAC's Environmental department is to ensure that rural communities comply with the Safe Drinking Water Act and Clean Water Act. With our RCAP partners, we have developed many trainings and tools that support this objective. In addition we provide one-on-one compliance focused technical assistance to rural and Tribal utilities. Tools will be developed and promoted to make permit and regulation compliance easier and more reliable. Also, digital record-keeping tools, including GIS data, will facilitate electronic reporting and public transparency.

- Goal 5: Ensure Clean and Safe Water for All Communities:
  - Objective 5.1: Ensure Safe Drinking Water and Reliable Water Infrastructure

As stated above, RCAC's Environmental department's primary objective is to support communities to comply with the Safe Drinking Water Act and the Clean Water Act. In conjunction with water system personnel, EFC staff will conduct a thorough evaluation of all the technical components that make up the system, including sources, pumping, treatment, storage, distribution, water quality and quantity, energy usage, water pumped vs. water sold, system security and level of vulnerability, and any other areas as needed. The EFC will also provide training that will assist rural water and wastewater system operators

to prepare capital improvement and asset management plans to ensure reliable infrastructure.

- Goal 6: Safeguard and Revitalize Communities:
  - Objective 6.2: Reduce Waste and Prevent Environmental Contamination
  - Prepare for and Respond to Environmental Emergencies

R10 EFC activities will promote sustainable and livable communities by developing resources and providing direct technical assistance to regionalize/consolidate operations. Achieving economies of scale is a key ingredient to sustainable utilities. The EFC will also provide infrastructure financing information, and tools and technical assistance on how to create financially sustainable infrastructure. EFC programs will improve emergency preparedness in water and wastewater utilities, and will address waste generation and management with solid/hazardous waste programs, including recycling and composting. EFC programs will have a particular focus on strengthening human health and environmental protection in Indian Country. Equitable distribution of environmental benefits will be promoted by the EFC's focus on Tribal and rural communities.

- Goal 7: Ensure Safety of Chemicals for People and the Environment:
  - Objective 7.1: Ensure Chemical and Pesticide Safety
  - Objective 7.2: Promote Pollution Prevention

Modern, properly built and maintained water and wastewater systems prevent pollution. The EFC's programs will be designed to achieve the highest level of utility management and operations and help utilities obtain financing to repair, improve, or update infrastructure. Chemical safety is addressed in the materials RCAC uses to train water and wastewater utility operators and in solid waste plant best practices protocols for hazardous waste. Chemical control and safety is a key concern in the development of any new infrastructure.

#### *b. Results of Activities (Outputs)*

The anticipated results of this project's activities include the following:

- Small, rural, Tribal, and/or disadvantaged communities in EPA Region 10 will have increased capacity to apply for, and access, State Revolving Fund (SRF) funding through BIL. With the EFC's technical assistance, communities will submit SRF funding applications for capital projects.
- Based on the EFC's work plan, an established number of communities will receive training that results in knowledge of available infrastructure funding and financing resources.
- Determined by the EFC's work plan, an established number of states or Tribal governments will receive income surveys, and/or technical assistance to identify and pursue tools, resources and other opportunities that support SRF programs to build their TA offerings for disadvantaged communities.
- The EFC will develop and implement training courses, information exchanges, and forums that focus on environmental finance,
- The EFC will develop electronic models and software tools focused on paying for environmental protection.

- The EFC will develop case studies and lessons-learned materials related to asset management, financial planning, and effective communication of needs for infrastructure investments and environmental projects (particularly for rural, small, Tribal, and/or disadvantaged communities). Articles based on case studies will be published in RCAP publications *Rural Matters* and *Drop of Knowledge*.
- The EFC will develop tools and resources to support identification of communities that need assistance, and to track the status of implemented solutions.

RCAC will monitor the accomplishment of expected Outputs by tracking achievement of deliverables, collecting data, monitoring due dates, and assisting project staff with report preparation. Monthly team room meetings will be held to assess project status.

The EFC will use an RCAC-designed TMF assessment tool for pre- and post-assessment of all TA projects. The tool provides a score and the status of more than 50 capacity components, rating them acceptable, in-progress/not complete, deficient, or critical concern. This tool is currently used to report on all EPA grants.

#### *c. Projected Financial and Environmental Improvement (Outcomes)*

The financial or environmental improvements that will be accomplished as a result of project activities will include:

- An increase in the number of communities (especially small, rural, Tribal, underserved, and/or disadvantaged communities) that successfully apply for and access financing and funding for infrastructure projects
- An increase in the number of communities (especially small, rural, Tribal, underserved, and/or disadvantaged communities) that understand how to access financing and funding for infrastructure projects
- An increase in the number of local, state, and Tribal governments, and non-governmental organizations that have the financial, technical, and institutional resources and capabilities to pay for environmental protection and operate in compliance with environmental requirements

RCAC's GCA department will monitor accomplishment of expected Outcomes by tracking achievement of deliverables, collecting data, monitoring due dates, and assisting project staff with report preparation. Monthly team room meetings will be held to assess project status.

The EFC will use an RCAC-designed TMF assessment tool for pre- and post-assessment of all TA projects. The tool provides a score and the status of more than 50 capacity components, rating them acceptable, in-progress/not complete, deficient, or critical concern. This tool is currently used to report on all EPA grants.

#### **iv. Detailed Budget Narrative:**

RCAC has been awarded federal grants and contracts for the past 44 years. Our Grants and Contracts Administration (GCA) department ensures contract deliverables, budget compliance, and timely and efficient grant funds expenditure. GCA currently administers more than 200 public and non-public grants and contracts. As with all projects funded by a specific grant, GCA will measure progress toward the achievement of goals in partnership with program managers and staff and will create timely reports.

The budget is designed to accomplish the proposed project’s goals, objectives, and measurable environmental outcomes. It provides the following approximate percentages of the total requested award for each major activity:

Program Coordination: 13.24 percent  
Tools and Outreach: 25.32 percent  
Training: 27.7 percent  
Direct Technical Assistance: 33.74 percent

*Personnel:* This category includes RCAC Environmental Manager, Rural Development Specialists and support staff members.

*Fringe benefits:* RCAC’s fringe benefits include FICA and Medicare, worker’s compensation, health, vision, life, disability and dental insurance, retirement, holidays, and paid time off. The fringe benefit expense is prorated based on current rate of 46.9 percent of salary.

*Travel:* This category includes mileage, car rental, and per diem (lodging and meals). All travel costs will meet the federal per diem guidelines and require supervisor approval.

*Supplies* – The supply category includes grant specific and consumable supplies. Consumable supplies are general supplies with an acquisition cost of \$5,000 or less such as paper, printer cartridges, copier toner, software licenses and computer disks.

*Other:*

Postage - \$5,500 over five years  
Printing - \$43,000 over five years  
Training Costs - \$30,000 over five years  
Subgrant to ZEHRG – \$250,000 (\$50,000 per year for five years)

*Indirect charges:* Indirect costs are those expenditures which benefit all programs undertaken by RCAC as a corporation and which cannot be directly charged to a specific funding source or program. These costs are allocated across all funding sources based on a negotiated indirect cost rate. RCAC’s federally approved indirect cost rate from 10/1/2021 through 9/30/2024 is 32 percent. The U.S. Department of Agriculture is RCAC’s cognizant agency.

#### v. Milestone Schedule:

<b>Year 1 Milestone: Agency Coordination</b>				
<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>
1.1: Meet with Region 10 EPA to assess current community need and priorities	X		X	
1.2: Met with State SRFs, primacy agencies, and IHS to assess current community need and priorities	X		X	
1.3: With RCAP, attend semi-annuals EFCN meetings and coordinate with National EPA.	X		X	
<b>Year 1 Milestone: Create Disadvantaged Community Identification tool</b>				
<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>
1.1: Begin research on available GIS format social, economic and environmental risk indicators	X	X	X	
1.2: Meet with State Primacy and SRF agencies and IHS to gather pertinent information on risk indicators	X	X	X	
1.3 Build and refine GIS tool		X	X	X



<b>Year 1 Milestone: Develop Community Development Workplan (CDW) template</b>				
<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>
2.1: Research	X	X	X	X
2.2: Draft generic CDW template		X	X	X
2.3: Share draft tool with client communities, compile feedback			X	X
2.4: Refine tool based on community feedback			X	X
2.5: Pilot refined tool with select communities				X
<b>Year 1 Milestone: Training at State funding events</b>				
<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>
3.1: Meet with State SRF's and Primacy agencies to assess local community needs	X	X	X	X
3.2: Outreach to entities coordinating State funding events		X	X	X
3.3: Event planning/scheduling trainings			X	X
3.4: Training			X	X
<b>Year 1 Milestone: Environmental financing tools</b>				
<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>
4.1: Begin review of existing tools	X	X	X	X
4.2: Begin research and development of new tools		X	X	X
<b>Year 1 Milestone: Direct Community TA and training</b>				
<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>
5.1: Assessing select communities Technical, Managerial, and Financial (TMF) capacity using existing RCAC/RCAP developed tool	X	X	X	X
5.2: Provide TA and training based on TMF assessment		X	X	X
5.3: Begin TA informed by newly developed CDW tool with pilot communities				X
<b>Year 1 Milestone: Translation to Central Alaskan Yup'ik and Spanish</b>				
<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>
6.1: Coordinate with Region 10 EPA to identify outreach/training materials to translate to Yup'ik and live (in person or virtual) events needing real time translation.	X	X	X	X
6.2: Coordinate with ID/OR/WA SRFs and primacy agencies to identify materials to translate to Spanish or live events needing real time translation	X	X	X	X
6.3: Begin translating materials and translating at live events		X	X	X
<b>Year 1 Milestone: Alaskan Solid Waste PSAs</b>				
<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>
7.1 Research and outreach to communities	X	X	X	X
7.2: Filming/editing/production of PSA videos		X	X	X
<b>Year 1 Milestone: Case studies</b>				
<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>
7.1: Develop case studies of project successes, challenges, and lesson learned				X
7.2: Share case studies with R10 EPA, State SRF and primacy agencies,				X
<b>Years 2 through 5 Milestones: Continuation of work started in year 1</b>				
<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>
8.1: Agency coordination (Region 10 EPA, State SRFs and primacy agencies, HIS)	X		X	
8.2: Refinement of DCI tool and CDW template	X	X	X	X
8.2 Training at State funding events	X	X	X	X
8.3 Environmental financing tool development and refinement	X	X	X	X
8.4 Direct community TA and training	X	X	X	X
8.5 Translation services	X	X	X	X
8.6: Alaskan Solid Waste PSA production	X	X	X	X
8.7 Case studies/publications				X
8.8: Publish articles based on case studies in National publications <i>Drop of Knowledge</i> and <i>Rural Matters</i> .		X		X



## **vi. Programmatic Capability/Experience:**

### **a. Organizational Experience**

RCAC assists rural communities throughout the West to build, improve, manage, operate, or finance drinking water and wastewater systems. RCAC has helped small, rural communities and Tribes to access millions of dollars in grants and loans, and trained thousands of individuals through customized technical assistance and workshops. RCAC's experienced instructors provide a broad range of trainings across a 13-state footprint to small municipal and nonprofit water and wastewater systems personnel.

For almost 44 years, RCAC has worked with rural communities in the western U.S., providing training and technical assistance to improve the quality of environmental utility service and ensure regulatory compliance. RCAC works under Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) contracts in Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Nevada, New Mexico and Washington to help small systems with technical, managerial and financial capacity building. These SRF funds support RCAC's programs to educate and train small water system operators, managers and boards. Additionally, RCAC provides services to small, rural utilities under grants and contracts with the EPA, Health and Human Services (HHS), Department of Agriculture (USDA) Indian Health Services (IHS), and other public and private funding sources.

RCAC is the western affiliate of the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP), a national network of six environmental technical assistance providers serving small rural communities. RCAC assists more than 500 communities each year to improve environmental and community health by developing sustainable water and waste disposal facilities, and increasing the capacity of system operators. Most of the communities we assist are economically disadvantaged and have populations under 2,500 and many have significant minority populations. RCAC places particular emphasis on providing culturally appropriate programs and services for Tribes and Hispanic farmworker and Colonias populations.

RCAC has operated and managed a Tribal Circuit Rider program for EPA Region 9 for nearly 30 years, and for Region 10 for the past seven years. RCAC's staff members have extensive technical knowledge and demonstrated expertise in all aspects of Tribal drinking water and wastewater systems operations, maintenance and management. In addition to this work in R10, RCAC has provided on-site technical assistance to Native organizations in all of the Region 10 states. RCAC established the Native American Water Masters Association (NAWMA) program in conjunction with its work with EPA R10. These quarterly peer-to-peer meetings provide a forum to discuss drinking water regulations, technologies, management and issues facing Tribal water utilities. NAWMA training meetings support drinking water certification and are recognized by the states for continuing education/professional development contact hours. These meetings will be an excellent forum for the presentation of training developed by the EFC staff and discussion of new tools.

In California, RCAC works under the Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) Program and Proposition 1 to provide disadvantaged communities with safe and affordable drinking water. RCAC delivers TA and training so DACs can demonstrate that they have adequate technical, managerial, and financial capacity to operate and maintain treatment systems in order to be eligible for funding.

Throughout its history, RCAC has emphasized environmental justice in its work with disadvantaged, minority population, rural communities. As a participant on the National Environmental Justice Advisory

Council, RCAC helps to provide advice and recommendations to the EPA on a broad range of issues related to environmental justice.

RCAC created its Loan Fund in 1988 and was certified as a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) in 1996. The Loan Fund was established in response to the unmet need in rural communities to finance community projects and RCAC is one of few CDFIs that provide access to capital for rural environmental infrastructure. Financing is available through the RCAC Loan Fund's low-interest loans that fill financing gaps and serve a client population that has been historically neglected by conventional markets. Two programs – the Environmental Recoverable Interest Fund and the Water Funders exchange – provide pre-development financing through zero percent short-term loans. RCAC's Grants and Contracts Administration (GCA) team works with field staff and managers to ensure that deliverables are achieved and reports are completed in a timely manner. The team holds monthly "team rooms" with all Contract Managers to document progress, discuss and find solutions to obstacles, and review budgets, timelines and deliverables. GCA coordinates with department directors and managers to gather all information needed to create and submit all required progress and final funding reports.

#### **b. Staff Expertise/Qualifications**

Full resumes for all proposed R10 Regional Multi-Environmental Media EFC staff are attached. The following RCAC key personnel will lead the team:

##### ***Ari Neumann, Director, Community & Environmental Services***

Ari Neumann became RCAC's Director of Community and Environmental Services in November of 2018 after serving as Assistant Director since 2016. He oversees more than 80 employees providing drinking water, wastewater, solid waste, and economic development assistance to rural and tribal communities in 13 western states. Mr. Neumann also manages a portfolio of technical assistance and training grants. In addition to supervising program work, Mr. Neumann directs RCAC's government affairs efforts.

##### ***Stevan Palmer, Assistant Director, Community & Environmental Services***

Stevan Palmer joined RCAC in 2003. He provides direct technical assistance to small rural utilities, and develops and delivers training on a variety of water-related topics with an emphasis on arsenic and nitrate remediation. Mr. Palmer works closely with communities on budget development, project development and funding, capital improvement planning, water and wastewater rate analysis, and regulatory compliance. He supervises a staff of regional managers and technical assistance providers in Alaska, California, Colorado, Idaho, Oregon, Utah and Washington. Mr. Palmer provides training and technical assistance in water treatment and distribution operator certification test preparation, compliance and mitigation, capital improvement planning, and water use efficiency.

##### ***Kristin K'eit, Regional Field Manager, Environmental Finance Center Manager***

Kristin K'eit joined RCAC in March 2019. She oversees eight staff working in Alaska, Oregon, and Washington who provide technical assistance and training to small drinking water systems via multiple funders: USDA Rural Development, WA Departments of Ecology and Health, OR Health Authority, and US EPA Region 10. Ms. K'eit oversees the EPA Region 10 Environmental Finance Center (EFC), which provides financing for utilities owned by tribal governments or on tribal lands. She monitors the development and delivery of multiple workshops and trainings including Asset Inventory and Management, Google Earth asset mapping, and operator training and certification. She ensures implementation of the Tribal Source Water Protection template, and finalizes financial modules used to evaluate actions needed in response to climate change-induced effects.

## **vii. Past Performance:**

RCAC has received federal and state grants for almost 44 years, and has demonstrated the ability to successfully manage multiple contracts, pass-through agreements, and multi-year budgeting associated with the most complicated of federal contracts. RCAC's Grants and Contracts Administration department administers and fulfills contract reporting requirements.

RCAC receives referrals from a state's Division of Drinking Water, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Regions, or Indian Health Service (IHS) for community drinking water systems that are out of compliance or in need of financial or managerial assistance. Following the referral, RCAC reaches out to the community to see if assistance is wanted. Once the community agrees to receive assistance, RCAC staff conduct a TMF assessment. This assessment is designed to ascertain root causes of the issues and identify other issues that could negatively impact long-term sustainability. Once these have been identified, RCAC and the community develop a scope of work and establish a timetable to ensure the project is completed on time and meets the community's goals.

Before beginning a project, RCAC identifies key stakeholders and consults with them to understand their goals and expectations. RCAC provides them with a review of the problem and how best to address it. This initial meeting not only provides a project overview, but also outlines timeframe constraints, and necessary milestones. Preferred communication methods between RCAC and the community are established and regular check-ins are scheduled. Communication methods can include telephone calls, email and in-person meetings.

RCAC uses a community work plan document that serves as guide for the scope of the project and lists key contacts, project objectives and scheduled meetings. Projects with competing interests, changing leadership or predominantly remote interactions can sometimes lose momentum. When this occurs, RCAC staff provides additional increased communication through site visits, phone calls or virtual meetings, and may recraft tasks into smaller, more easily achieved components, which can help to move a project forward.

RCAC has a demonstrated, effective process to manage all contract requirements, including quality control and effective oversight from initial work plan development to timely drawn-down and contract close-out. RCAC's Grants and Contracts Administration (GCA) department ensures contract deliverables, budget compliance and reporting in a timely manner.

RCAC tracks completion of deliverables and provides project close-out reports. Reports are submitted as required by the contracting agency's schedule, and include work completed, work to be completed, and issues encountered. The majority of our projects are completed within the performance period of the grants under which we are providing technical assistance. In some cases, projects are rolled over across funding cycles. To measure customer satisfaction, RCAC sends out surveys via e-mail or mail on completion of every project.

## Assistance Agreements Performed Within the Last Three Years

Contracting Agency	<b>Cadmus Group LLC</b>
Contract Title	Cadmus 21
Contract Type	Time and Materials
Description of contract	Circuit rider services to Region 10 regulated Tribal water systems in AK, ID, OR, WA
Period of Performance	11/01/2020 – 06/30/2022
Reporting History	Monthly reporting required with quarterly check in meetings. All reports to date submitted on time
Contracting Agency	<b>Washington Department of Health (DOH)</b>
Contract Title	SRFWA22
Contract Type	Cost reimbursement
Description of contract	TA to small public water systems in WA
Period of Performance	10/01/2021 – 06/30/2022
Reporting History	Monthly reporting with invoices and annual summary report. All reporting to date submitted on time
Contracting Agency	<b>Environmental Protection Agency Region 10</b>
Contract Title	EPA EFC
Contract Type	Cooperative Agreement (RCAP prime; RCAC sub-grantee)
Description of contract	Quarterly reporting. All reporting to date submitted on time.
Period of Performance	01/01/2016 – 08/30/2022
Contracting Agency	<b>US Dept. of Health and Human Services</b>
Contract Title	HHS 21
Contract Type	Cost Reimbursement
Description of contract	Rural community development facilities program
Period of Performance	09/30/2021 – 09/29/2022
Reporting History	RCAP compiles reports quarterly based on ongoing activity reports RCAC submits to a reporting database. All reports to date submitted on time.
Contracting Agency	<b>Rural Community Assistance Partnership</b>
Contract Title	EPA 1 G
Contract Type	Cost Reimbursement
Description of contract	Training/TA to improve Water Quality & enable small PWSs to maintain compliance w/SDWA
Period of Performance	10/01/2021 – 03/31/2023
Reporting History	Semi-annual reports and final report at the end of a 5 year funding cycles. All reports to date submitted on time

**viii. Attached Additional Materials**

- a. Resumes**
- b. Support Letters**